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## VERNACULAR NAMES OF ANIMALS.

EDWIN W. DORAN.

THE interests of popular science demand the introduction of some system in writing the common, or vernacular, names of animals and plants. There is not only a great lack of uniformity among authors as to the correct form of these names ; but in case of some approach to an agreement with regard to certain forms, often the agreement is without reference to the principles that underlie the formation of such words.

From an examination of many thousand names of animals it appears that only about ten per cent. of the names consist of a single word ; about thirty per cent. consist of two or more words which should be written in separate form ; about sixty per cent. consist of two or more words which should be written in compound form. (Not all of these should have a hyphen, however, as will be shown later). What names should be included in this sixty per cent. is a problem upon the solution of which this paper is designed to shed some light.

There are those who say the solution of the problem lies in abolishing the use of vernacular names entirely, and using in their stead the more exact technical names. There is little hope of getting any except the most rigidly scientific, to adopt for everyday use the unfamiliar forms derived from foreign languages, no matter how exact they may be. Vernacular names always have been in use and no doubt always will be. No one expects to live to see the day when we shall discard the familiar names of dog, cat, rabbit, squirrel, cow, and sheep, and use in their places the high-sounding though exact names derived from the Latin or the Greek. If we retain these common names, — household words, — we may expect also to retain such other names derived from them, as prairie-dog, wildcat, jack-rabbit, ground-squirrel, sea-cow, and mountain-sheep. Then we are likely to distinguish still farther between the many closely-related forms by using Missouri prairie-dog, American wildcat, white-

tailed jack-rabbit, striped ground-squirrel, Dall mountain-sheep, etc.

These terms are less exact for English-speaking people than the corresponding technical ones simply because of the confusion that has always existed in writing them; because of the many names that have been applied to the same animal. The same confusion would exist with reference to the technical names but for the carefully prepared synonymies. I believe that I am the first<sup>1</sup> who has thought it necessary to prepare a synonymy of the vernacular names of animals.

Some writers appear to have an antipathy for the much-abused little character, known as a hyphen. This seems to be true also of many printers and publishers. As one writer puts it, "A hyphen affects some printers very much as a red rag does an angry bull"; hence they omit the greater number of hyphens in a manuscript. Many writers on science relegate to the printer or to their amanuensis such details of manuscript-revision and proof-reading, owing to a lack of authorities on the subject.

Dr. J. A. Allen says<sup>2</sup>: "If the use of the hyphen could be permanently regulated by the formation of a set of rules, how great a boon would be conferred upon writers, and particularly upon editors! As, however, the use of the hyphen varies within wide limits, in accordance with the radically different rules enforced by editors and publishing houses, from its practical non-use to its employment to connect remote elements into a compound word, there is little hope of securing a uniform system of hyphenization in the construction of bird names. . . . In publications which allow the hyphen its time-honored function, great diversity is met with in just the class of cases to which Dr. Doran has called attention."

Here is the difficulty. Every writer has some system of rules which he follows in compounding words (provided he gives any attention to the subject at all); but too often these rules are formulated without regard to language-principles or reason.

<sup>1</sup> The author has in preparation a synonymy of all the vernacular names of vertebrates. Mr. Robert Ridgway many years ago suggested the need of something of this kind for the names of birds.

<sup>2</sup> *The Auk*, Jan. 1903, discussing my article on Vernacular Names of Birds.

Some have not taken the trouble to reduce their rules to tangible form or to a system, and thereby get rid of their inconsistencies.

Now, I believe that a system of rules may be formulated and in accordance with the established principles of the English language, by means of which we may be rid of the present chaos in compounding the vernacular names of animals.

The writer has previously attempted this for certain groups of animals<sup>1</sup> and in this paper the discussion is extended so as to include all classes of vertebrates and the insects.

Before formulating a set of rules for compounding the vernacular names of animals, it is necessary to give attention to a few well-established general principles — principles which are recognized by all the great masters of English, though expressed concisely by few writers. In fact, the literature of the subject is very meager, and only within the last twenty years has there been any serious attempt to evolve a system of writing such words.

The *Standard Dictionary* lays down three general principles for compounding English words,<sup>2</sup> the second of which is as follows: "Abnormal association of words generally indicates unification in sense, and hence compounding in form." In accordance with this principle I submit the following rules for compounding the vernacular names of animals.<sup>3</sup> Following each rule are given numerous examples taken from the different groups of animals to show the application of the rules. The first rule is more general than the rest, and to some extent includes the others.

*Write in compound form, —*

- I. Any pair of names or words in joint arbitrary use; as, leaf-roller, black-nosed dace, four-toed salamander, red-bellied snake, blue-throated lizard, soft-shelled turtle, whippoorwill, polecat.

<sup>1</sup> See '*Entomological News*,' Nov. 1902, for a discussion of the vernacular names of insects, and '*The Auk*,' January, 1903, previously cited, for a similar treatment of the names of birds.

<sup>2</sup> Consult also the works of F. Horace Teall on compounding English words.

<sup>3</sup> These rules are intended to apply to insects and vertebrates only, but will be found serviceable for all forms.

2. A general name used with any other name prefixed for specification denoting,
  - a. Food or prey ; as, potato-beetle, spawn-eater, chicken-snake, duck-hawk, rice-rat.
  - b. Host ; as, horse-fly, dog-flea (chiefly parasites).
3. A general name used with any other name prefixed for specification denoting,
  - a. Similarity ; as, mole-cricket, alligator-gar, cricket-frog, garter-snake, box-turtle, turkey-vulture, fox-squirrel.
  - b. Habit ; as, army-worm, pilot-fish, rattlesnake, snapping-turtle, butcher-bird, flying-squirrel.
  - c. Habitat ; as, house-fly, brook-trout, tree-frog, water-moccasin, fence-lizard, land-tortoise, wood-duck, prairie-dog.
  - d. Characteristic ; as, scale-insect, sword-fish, spade-foot frog, horn-snake, spine-tailed lizard, map-turtle, song-sparrow, musk-ox.
4. A phrase consisting of an adjective and a noun together used as a mere name, formed by writing (generally in solid form),
  - a. An adjective with the name of an animal ; as, whitefish, blacksnake, redbird, wildcat.
  - b. An adjective with the name of some characteristic feature of the animal ; as, longsting, blackfin, bluetail (lizard), yellowlegs, bighorn.

I feel safe in affirming that the foregoing rules are so simple that anybody can apply them ; that they are sufficiently comprehensive to include all names of the groups indicated ; and that they are in accord with reason, language-principles, and the usages of the highest authorities.<sup>1</sup> I admit that the rank and file of investigators in any particular department of science may vary widely in usage from these rules, or any other set of rules that might be formulated.

All the vernacular names can not be found in any one diction-

<sup>1</sup> As representative of the 'highest authorities' on this subject I would include the *Standard Dictionary*, the *Century Dictionary*, Murray's *New English Dictionary*, and such special works as Newton's *Dictionary of Birds*. Webster's 'International' and other older dictionaries will not always be found in accord with the authorities just named in compounding words, nor with these rules.

ary, nor in all combined, perhaps; neither do these authorities cited always agree in compounding words, just as they do not always agree in spelling and pronunciation; but they are the best reflectors of good usage we have. In fact, the chief function of the dictionary is to exhibit the usages of the best speakers and writers.

There is one phase of the question on which it is somewhat difficult to secure uniformity. Compound words are divided into two classes: (1) separable compounds, written with the hyphen, as 'tent-caterpillar'; and (2) solidified compounds, written without the hyphen, as 'ladybird.' It is not easy to formulate rules for determining just when the hyphen may be omitted from a compound, and the word written solid. Generally the old and familiar forms are solidified, while the newer and unfamiliar names retain the hyphen; but age and frequency of use alone can not determine. However, this is not so important as some other phases of the subject. Words are compound whether hyphenated or solid, and the choice of forms depends more upon taste, since no fundamental language-principle is at stake. But we should strive for uniformity in this respect also. The limits of this paper will not admit a fuller discussion of this feature.

There should be some concerted attempt to secure uniformity in writing the vernacular names of animals. The principles and rules which govern in these matters are just as binding with regard to the hyphen as with regard to capital letters, punctuation, or the construction of sentences. There is no more reason for a writer's ignoring the correct use of the hyphen than for his ignoring any other essential to good orthography or correct syntax.